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The Forgotten Farmworkers of Apopka, Florida: Prospects for Collaborative Research and Activism to Assist African-American Former Farmworkers

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Title Short Form: Collaboration with Farmworkers

Abstract: Anthropology's crisis of representation of the 1980s has given way to a millennial crisis of involvement. As neoliberal policies proliferate and intensify wealth and social inequalities, anthropologists have considered ways to conduct engaged research that can contribute to social justice. One possibility is the prospect of collaboration between anthropologists and activists. In this article we examine our own collaborative research with an anthropologist and activist organization. We highlight benefits of long-term community engagement projects for activist-oriented community partners and students.

Keywords: engaged anthropology, activism, community collaboration, experiential learning.

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Our "toxic tour" of Apopka, Florida crossed through rural landscapes of abandoned farms and orange groves, restored wetlands and bucolic pastures, dotted here and there with modest homes or trailers. To the naked eye it might have seemed we were observing the untouched beauty of nature, but we knew better, knew that the land, air, and water surrounding the lake bore the scars of its history: fifty years of pesticides washed from land to lake during periodic floodings, two Superfund sites where errant chemical companies had spilled high doses of pesticides into the lake, sewage and orange pulp waste, a medical waste incinerator, and an enormous landfill. For hours we drove around in the Farmworkers' Association van with employees of the Orange County Health Department, while former farmworker Geraldean Matthew[1] narrated the landscape. Rain intermittently streamed down the windows of the battered minivan, whose radio was stuck on a salsa station that played a festive soundtrack decidedly out of keeping with Geraldean's sobering stories. Now in her late fifties and afflicted with a host of serious ailments related to her years of work in the fields and exposure to pesticides, Geraldean is a community activist, but one who is rapidly tiring out. As we drove, she pointed out farmworkers' houses, backed up against a towering landfill. We stopped to inspect an overgrown farm, now a nature park, where Geraldean pointed out places that young women back in the farming days often hid from overseers to avoid sexual assault. Here and there, the state of Florida has erected park signs and posted progress reports about wetlands restoration and the return of native species to the area. There are other signs, too, announcing which chemicals have been applied to the lake in a particular week for treatment of an algae problem, or a nuisance fish. But without Geraldean's narration, the human element would be effectively erased from the landscape.

Finally our tour ended at Lake Apopka, its distant banks invisible in the fog. Much of the lake was drained in the 1940s to allow for farming to aid in the war effort. When farmers flooded their land to control weed growth, phosphorus and pesticides slipped into the lake, contributing to the existing contamination of orange pulp from the citrus industry and sewage from the City of Winter Garden. While the Clean Air and Water Act of the 1970s prevented sewage and orange pulp from entering the lake, by the 1980s farmers averaged 5 million gallons of waste a day. In 1998 the state of Florida spent nearly $100 million to buy 14,000 acres of farmland and restore it to wetlands.[2] Rather than draining the fields as farmers had done in the past, the state allowed water to stand, attracting a large number of birds to the area. Within weeks over 1,000 birds died, including white pelicans, wood storks, and bald eagles.

Although the massive bird death from attempts to create "wetlands" garnered national attention in 1998, almost nothing has been said of the people who worked those fields for so many years. Fewer than five hundred remain in this community of mostly African-American farmworkers, and we were a student/professor team who had set out to witness what they endured, to understand a healthcare system that denies both health and care, and to see if there was any way to use our own positions to assist them.

In this article, we explore the results of our attempt to conduct engaged, collaborative fieldwork between an anthropologist, a student, and a nonprofit organization: the Farmworker Association of Florida. Compelled to action by witnessing intense wealth and health inequities, this research was designed with the intent to relieve suffering of former farmworkers who continue to face serious health concerns as a result of their labor. Despite our intentions, we ultimately learned that collaborative research presents a number of challenges that anthropologists working independently may not face, including the necessity of translating

taken-for-granted research practices into a layperson's terms and also recognizing that methods and goals of activist-oriented non-profits may not be the same as those of anthropologists. However, activists can offer a rapid entry point into local communities, insofar as they are often already enmeshed in the lives of community members. This article examines the benefits and drawbacks to collaborative, engaged research with non-profits, suggesting that the ideal outcome could be an ongoing partnership between schools and nonprofits, rather than a traditional scholarly article or monograph. Because our collaboration involved attending to the concerns of the non-profit and the socially marginalized farmworkers, our results often took unexpected forms, and we found it difficult to hew closely to a model of research in which anthropologists still set the agenda despite claiming to be attuned to the concerns of their consultants. Here we call for a humanistic, engaged anthropology that is attuned to the ways we can amplify the multiple voices of communities with whom we engage. We document our own efforts to respond (with mixed results) to the twin goals stated by both the non-profit and the former farmworkers: to gain access to healthcare, and to bring the farmworkers' stories of exploitation to a wider audience. Ultimately, a reflexive approach that acknowledges both the anthropologists' failures and successes while also highlighting the possibilities for further action seemed to us to be the most logical way of writing about our research. The greater benefit was to be found in future collaborations between the university and the Farmworker Association, which resulted in greater publicity for farmworker-related concerns and a partnership that has allowed successive groups of students to gain firsthand familiarity with the concerns of a marginalized community.

History of Apopka Florida and Agricultural Labor

Located north of Orlando, Florida, Apopka is an exurb of a city most associated with Walt Disney World and tourism. Unlike many of its neighboring towns, however, Apopka does not thrive on a tourist economy, and the city has a long history of an economy based in agriculture and foliage industry. Although many of the agricultural farms in Apopka closed and were flooded to restore Lake Apopka to its original size before parts of the lake were drudged to create farms, the city still has a thriving fern industry, and is known as "fern city" and "the indoor foliage capital of the world." The farmworkers we interviewed mostly engaged in agricultural labor, and were ultimately forced to stop working due to a combination of old age, the farms closing, and being hindered to work because of medical problems. As the representative stories from the farmworkers illustrate, the piecemeal pay structure concomitant to some forms of agricultural labor encouraged the former farmworkers to abandon safety equipment if it was available, leaving them directly exposed to harmful chemicals that resulted in a number of serious health problems.

Because many of the farmworkers were paid in cash and did not have their wages reported to federal agencies, they are not eligible for premium-free Medicare, the ostensible safety net medical care program for the elderly. They also had difficulty applying for Medicaid since many lived with adult children who earned wages above the Medicaid eligible poverty level, but were still unable to afford private health insurance or pay out of pocket for medical expenses. The farmworkers' labor-related medical concerns compelled us to action, and led us to consider ways of addressing their health needs by leveraging resources available to us as anthropologists.

Over three semesters and a summer, we interviewed farmworkers wherever possible, visiting them in their homes, at the Farmworkers' Association of Florida (FWAF), at clinics,

health fairs, and health departments. But as Jeannie Economos, our initial contact from the FWAF told us, farmworkers did not simply want to be interviewed. "They've been surveyed to death," she told us at one point, and the farmworkers agreed. One woman told us,

"People come here all the time, wanting to know about our problems and hear us tell our stories. But we still don't have healthcare."

Most of the former farmworkers we interviewed were living in poverty. Some lived in households with multiple generations, while others were trying to balance taking care of grandchildren while seeking medical care for their numerous ailments. Most did not have cars and relied on public transport or rides from friends to attend doctors' appointments. Many were also involved in community activism, attempting to make improvements to their community, such as creating more after school programs at a local community center that served as one of the few after school resources for children who might otherwise be drawn into crime. All were in their sixties or older, and none were currently working. Their overriding concern at the time we worked with them, though, was finding access to adequate healthcare, and they hoped that perhaps we might possess the persistence, energy, or wherewithal to succeed where they themselves had failed at attaining it. So this is what we set forth to do.

Anthropologists' Fieldnotes and Farmworkers' Stories

Anthropologist 1:

Apopka strikes visitors first and foremost with its rural character. Twelve miles north of Orlando, patchy efforts at upscale development lie interspersed with old farmland and weed-choked wilderness that remind me much more of the South Carolina I grew up in than Florida. The farms, abandoned in 1998, still offer evidence of their existence-- the illegally buried

pesticide containers that rise to the surface during periods of intense rainfall, or roads set back from Highway 441 that lead through orange groves and sod farms to land that is being "reclaimed" for wetlands. Like buried landmines, everywhere there are signs reminding people that pesticides are still in the soil, and that hunting or fishing are activities not to be undertaken, yet this is too little, too late for the people who worked the land for so long, toiling in the fields as the fine mist of organo-chlorines wafted over their faces from planes high above.

On Sunday we interviewed Mary[3], a woman who worked the farms back in the 1950s and 1960s, always wearing a hat to protect her face, even though supposedly nobody knew back then, no employer or crew supervisor informed them that they should leave the fields when the spraying started. Her face was smooth, nut-brown, almost unlined for a seventy-seven year-old woman, but her arms and legs bore the strange, patchy discoloration symptomatic of pesticide-related skin disorders. "I was always vain about my face," she told us. Her story, like that of many of the others told by former farmworkers we have interviewed, was all too familiar: diabetes, inexplicable and painful skin conditions, arthritis, children and grandchildren with high rates of allergies, learning disabilities, lupus. Slightly less than half of her children she buried before her. She didn't go into the reasons why.

Anthropologist 2:

On Thursday we visited the home of Edna, a widow to a former Apopka farmworker. "C'mon, c'mon in!" she repeated from the worn and rickety wooden stairs outside her front door, waving to us in her pink floral dress and gold bejeweled sandals. Meeting her was like reuniting with a relative or an old friend: someone we hadn't seen in years but with whom we had managed to somehow keep in touch. In her small living room, we sat down on couches

covered with pillowcases to hide their wear. A lamp missing a lampshade adorned a small side table. The cracked walls, here and there covered with shelving paper, featured pictures of relatives and a canvas of a waterfall. Once we set up the video camera, we asked Edna to tell us her story. She began by telling us about her husband, who had worked on farms since he was a young boy, and suffered a stroke late in his life. When the farm manager was informed about his stroke, he gave Edna a $20 bill and told her that if her husband couldn't work, he shouldn't come around anymore.

After a short while, two of Edna's daughters, Whitney and Sandra, entered the house and sat with us. Whitney and Sandra were more emotionally charged than Edna; a lifetime of hardship left them outraged with their country, questioning how such a wealthy nation could have such poverty and little assistance for those in need. Whitney and Sandra described their father's and their own skin problems from contact with pesticides (Sandra still works in the local fern greenhouses), and their lack of medical care. Apopka has one overcrowded dental clinic that is no longer taking new patients and a health clinic that only handles easily solvable problems. Sandra's children also need specialist attention, as they suffer from behavioral issues such as difficulty with anger management and attention deficit disorder. Whitney and Sandra are not eligible for Medicaid—the $323 a week Sandra earns is too much money for assistance. Whitney began to cry.

"Our daddy spent his whole life working on the farms, and we have nothing to show for it." At that moment I realized the extent of the hardship these women had faced. Edna's outlook on life was slightly more positive because of her faith in God, which kept her strong in difficult times, especially while taking care of her husband after she suffered from an aneurism. When we got up to leave, we all hugged, and Edna, Whitney, and Sandra thanked us for listening to them.

We told them we were happy to listen but we want to do more—we want to take action to help end their suffering and marginalization. As we walked out the door and onto the damp wooden stairs, we could hear Edna's motherly voice behind us. "Hold on to the handrail now!" Edna said gently. Edna exuded the sense that she considered everyone her children, and looked after them accordingly. How is it a mother to everyone she meets cannot get a better system of support for herself?

The research problem:

These fieldnotes were representative of the farmworker life histories we collected over the course of 2007. During this time, we conducted ethnographic fieldwork with the aim of both highlighting social determinants of health and creating a positive change in the lives of this African-American former farmworker community. In this sense we adopted an "ethnography from below" (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003) perspective: studying a specific location while also "demystifying the nature of the neoliberal state" (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003: 177). Through this perspective, we sought to "unmask both material and ideological effects of neoliberalism" (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003: 177). that perpetuate inequality and find potential audiences who might adopt the Apopka farmworkers' plight as a cause for action. We ultimately chose to share the former farmworkers' hardships with our college community in hopes of inspiring further engagement with the farmworkers of Apopka, and politicized anthropology to encourage experiential education.

Combining anthropology, engagement, and experiential learning can provide a collaborative creation of knowledge (Hathaway and Kuzin) and also teach students to critically evaluate seemingly self-evident yet ambiguous ideas such as "empowerment" and "self help"

(Hyatt), which ultimately comport with neoliberal agendas of increasing individual responsibility and masking systems of inequality. To many students, these terms are innocuous and do not carry associations with furthering hegemonic aims. Experiential learning, through collaborative and engaged ethnography, however, can reveal to students how terms such as "empowerment" and "self help" fuel neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility and fail to acknowledge broader structural constraints, or the ways in which structural violence can constrain individual agency. Structural violence, a product of historical and economic consequences (Farmer 1999: 79; Farmer 2004: 307-308) contributes to the suffering of individuals and can lead to embodied forms of suffering (Farmer 2010) .

In collaborating with us on a research design for our fieldwork, the Farmworker Association asked us investigate how former farmworkers might find medical specialists who could diagnose and treat their pesticide-related health problems. Our own goals were to understand the structural constraints that affected farmworker agency in receiving healthcare. In theory, both aims seemed to mesh well together. We conducted numerous, moving interviews with farmworkers who spoke not only about their own health issues but also those of their children and grandchildren, who also suffered from the effects of exposure to pesticides while *in utero*. The farmworkers often had visible skin problems, their arms and legs covered with rashes that had plagued them for years. It was difficult for them to show true "evidence" that other illnesses were related to exposure to pesticides, since some conditions, such as lupus or thyroid problems, are a set of symptoms that that cannot be detected by a specific diagnostic lab test. Instead, these difficult to diagnose symptoms require diagnosis and treatment by a medical specialist.

We discovered that farmworkers desired not only health care, but also acknowledgment from the wider community that their illnesses were a result of pesticide exposure incurred through hard work to "put food on America's tables," as one woman told us. But as we continued our research, we realized that the validation of farmworker suffering was an easier task than finding healthcare for them. Under the structure of the current healthcare system, attaining specialist healthcare was nearly impossible. Because only a limited number of doctors participate in Medicaid programs, finding a specialist such as an endocrinologist or a rheumatologist willing to take on patients pro-bono was difficult. Additionally, many of the farmworkers or their family members were uninsured and ineligible for Medicaid or Medicare. We studied programs in other states that brought medical care to the under or uninsured, and we further looked into establishing a free clinic, but we found that most of these would still only handle general physical ailments.

Our research was multisited in scope: our collaborator at the Farmworkers Association, Jeannie Economos, was generous about arranging farmworker interviews and inviting us to all local events that related to the issue of healthcare for the Apopka farmworkers. From the farmworker interviews we sought ethnographic knowledge on the forms of structural oppression that prevented farmworkers from receiving care, and from the "official" fieldsites we hoped to establish contacts with professionals who might be in a position to offer more care to the farmworkers. We attended an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) environmental justice conference in Jacksonville, numerous meetings of the Orange County Health Department focused on the issue of health in Apopka, and planning and strategy sessions for a local hospital. Concerned with the high level of emergency room visits (translate: nonpaying customers in advanced stages of heart disease), the hospital was in the midst of planning a heart disease-

focused outreach campaign directed at the South Apopka community, which included not just former farmworkers but also other African Americans in lower-income brackets.

There was a tremendous disconnect between these "strategy" sessions and our interviews with the farmworkers, who lived in conditions of great poverty and spoke to us eloquently of their years toiling in the fields, and of injustice and racism. The "official" meetings were gatherings of well-meaning, mostly Caucasian professionals, charity and nonprofit workers, and local government officials, all of whom were aware of the community's health problems and the lack of access to healthcare. Pesticides, however, were almost never mentioned—instead, professionals were more likely to talk about diet and lifestyle choices as contributing factors to the community's illnesses. A common theme was "empowering" individuals to "take control" of their own health. This particular discourse of "empowering" diminished the impact of structural determinants of health, and meetings ended with everyone taking home an "assignment" to do more research. Meeting attendance was inconsistent, which meant that there were always new people present who had little knowledge of the scope of the problems. For example, the health department staff member assigned to the Apopka issue changed three times over a six-month period, and in each case was given the Apopka assignment in addition to other full-time work. Hospital officials seemed most interested in reducing the number of costly emergency room visits by those for whom a trip to the emergency room was often the only time they were able to see a doctor.

These meetings frustrated us with their bureaucratic and clinical overtones, and the pervasive discourse of individual responsibility revealed how neoliberal economic ideologies worked to mask the way in which the farmworkers' health concerns were directly related to their labor. Rather than recognizing the way in which labor-related health concerns negatively

effected a population without access to preventive care, officials told farmworkers to "take responsibility" for their health, ignoring any factors that exist beyond health behaviors. Discourses of individual responsibility that are concomitant with neoliberal market ideologies ultimately conflicted with farmworkers' appeals that were grounded in social justice rhetoric. Even though the former farmworkers were invited to participate, different communication styles meant that the format of the meetings gave little space for the roundabout way that farmworkers voiced their concerns. The farmworkers' rhetorical strategies involved telling stories that would gain sympathy and recognition that their health problems stemmed directly from pesticides. These rhetorical tactics worked well in activist-oriented settings where the desired outcome was a sense of outrage and affirmation of social justice issues, but in bureaucratic settings the farmworkers' speeches were often cut short or ignored. Farmworkers viewed these encounters as an opportunity to speak to gatekeepers of the medical profession who could attend to their concerns, but unfortunately the desired assistance was not forthcoming. Although many of the health professionals were sympathetic to the farmworkers' desire for healthcare, the structural barriers of the existing healthcare system were simply insurmountable.

Our positioning in these settings was also uncomfortable. As anthropologists we were called upon to serve as cultural brokers who had worked with this target population and could speak with authority about "barriers to access" or "noncompliance," which healthcare professionals seemed to imagine as a general stubbornness or unwillingness to follow prescribed treatments, to show up for appointments on time, or, in the words of one doctor, "to learn that they have to take control of their own health." Yet from what the farmworkers told us, their experiences were completely different: being turned away from medical clinics and doctor's offices for lack of insurance, trying (and failing) to negotiate the labyrinthine Medicaid

bureaucracy, and, if they did manage to see a doctor, receiving countless prescriptions without understanding exactly what was wrong with them or what the medicine was supposed to fix.

Victoria Sanford has spoken of a shift in anthropological perspective from "self-conscious reflection" to the "status of expert observer challenging official discourses" (2006: 5). Called upon to comment as anthropologists, we attempted to position ourselves not as passionate activists but as experts capable of offering culturally appropriate insights. For example, at a meeting of hospital administrators working on a preventive heart care program, when the topic was on the "rewards" that could be given to former farmworkers for attending the set goal of 80% of the hospital's preventive healthcare meetings, we argued against the reward several administrators had suggested of a Wal-Mart giftcard. Since one of the community's stated problems was their lack of access to grocery stores, we suggested the "reward" might be a grocery bag full of produce, accompanied by a substantive discussion of how the produce could be adapted to a family's eating habits. This was not, however, going to change the fact that the grocery stores themselves were out of range of public transportation and that many of the former farmworkers did not have cars, limiting them to nearby convenience stores that sold mostly packaged junk food and alcohol.

More alarmingly, ignoring the structural issues surrounding the farmworkers' health concerns perpetuated neoliberal ideals of individual responsibility that reduce situations to individuals failing to comply with market logic and a rhetoric of responsibility (Maskovsky 2005; O'Daniel 2008). Combating strong ideologies of neoliberalism led us to find a course of action that could combine activism with resources available to us from our affiliation with an academic institution.

Issues involved in conducting research with nonprofits

Our collaboration with an activist-oriented nonprofit did not always lend itself to the types of theoretical insights anthropologists seek. In trying to remain open to the concerns of the Farmworkers Association, we made ourselves available to research new leads in the healthcare quest according to the organization's needs. Yet this often meant that we were looking into new issues every week, rather than going more deeply into well-traveled territory. Sally Engle Merry writes that, "The role of researcher and activist are incommensurate in their approach to knowledge practices but complementary in their effects on global social reform" (Merry 2005: 243). Like activists, anthropologists advocating for marginalized groups also hope to promote social change, yet it is difficult at times to convince activists that we aim to do so not by marching on the headquarters of Burger King or Florida state government but by understanding the multiple layers of social problems in such a way that our work might lead to changes in policy. Understanding the nuances of social problems allows for anthropologists to engage in system-challenging praxis (Singer 1986) in order to critique large and often unseen social structures that activists are not always able to identify. Indeed, our research revealed that the economic system surrounding the former farmworkers' labor played a large role in their assortment of health problems and inability to find treatment.

Our research, though intensive, did not result in the scholarly monograph we had originally hoped to produce. By working closely with a population under crisis, we acknowledged they could not simply be "there" for our research, but instead had rapidly changing needs that we were determined to address as best we could. Because of this, it was difficult to focus on one problem or theme and follow it through successive interviews. Additionally, we often relied on the Farmworker Association to introduce us to people who

would participate in our research, and the nonprofit's interest in taking part in the interviews often led to those interviews taking on a decidedly activist-oriented tone. As Sally Engle Merry has noted, anthropologists and activists seek narratives for different purposes. Activists use tragic stories combined with statistics to provoke responses of indignation and outrage that will inspire their audience to action. Anthropologists, on the other hand, draw attention to structural forces, and must gear their writing to an academic audience, using subtleties of theoretical insight that may appear opaque to a non-academic audience. We recorded some touching, devastating, and horrifying life histories of years of exploitation on the farms, a society that had continuously failed and marginalized the farmworkers and now, had moved on to a new population who someday will have the same problems they recounted to us. But frequently during our interviews, when one of the farmworkers launched into a critique of a government that had failed them, our activist friend, camera in hand, would focus on the type of outraged commentary that might motivate an observer to action but would be of little use to the anthropologist. "Repeat that! Say again for the camera what you just said about the Bush administration!"

Using a College Setting to Amplify Marginalized Voices

Returning to the territory of ethnography and faced with a depressingly exclusive healthcare system in which we had failed to make any sort of dent, what were we to do with the stories the farmworkers told us? Where could we expect to have any sort of impact at all that might justify the time they had spent with us, hoping we might offer some sort of solution? We were cognizant of the hubris implicit in thinking that we would be able to help out, yet we reasoned that perhaps our positioning in the university system might give us access to

sympathetic audiences these former farmworkers had not yet reached. Our goal was not the problematic trap of "giving voice to the voiceless," which can potentially misrepresent informants, but rather amplifying the voices of those who struggle to be heard, despite being frequently ignored, as we witnessed in their encounters with the medical profession. In considering potentially sympathetic audiences that would be receptive to the farmworkers' stories and be in a position to take action, we examined our college community as a possible location for informing new audiences about a widely ignored population. Perhaps those sympathetic audiences might contain someone who could actually be in a structural position to offer concrete solutions to the lack of healthcare. Or, at the very least, these talks could contribute to the growing awareness of both the toll that pesticides are taking on our environment and a crumbling healthcare system. The endocrine-disrupting chemicals to which farmworkers were exposed have long-lasting effects, causing illness and disabilities not only for farmworkers but also for their descendants.

Addressing sympathetic audiences requires identifying social problems while avoiding the precarious possibility of turning away an audience through polarizing emotional appeals. In an academic setting, an activist rally would have little success in convincing the unconvinced unless careful attention is first drawn to a social problem. For students, this problem is humanized through direct contact with the individuals who have experienced the injustice. As mentioned earlier, we wanted to share with the college community our own initial shock upon realizing the poverty and environmental degradation farm workers face just twelve miles up the road from our university. Our vision of American farm life was shattered the day we first drove across the street from the Farmworker Association office into a world of intense poverty and suffering. Although the journey was not far in physical distance, it took us far away from the

romanticized, almost *American Gothic* perceptions of farming that most Americans have, and plunged us into the frightening realities of farm workers living in shacks with dirt floors.

The farmworkers had also expressed a desire for more people to hear their stories. We decided to address the problem starting at smaller levels, bringing farmworker rights to the forefront of an academic setting where the perils of arduous farmwork are rarely considered. The Apopka farmworkers have consistently been forgotten, a trend that is not exclusive to Central Florida, as few Americans consider the labor associated with the food on their tables. Comestibles have become packaged items, finished products that prevent consumers from considering the labor involved with their cultivation. For the university students we wanted to engage, meals are made accessible through a pre-selected, already prepared, completed product, paid for by the swipe of an individualized, refillable card. Food preparation is only highlighted when it is a matter of choice, such as deciding on a pasta sauce, fruit for a smoothie, or deli meat on a sandwich. To some extent the college students we aimed to engage with the Apopka farmworkers were even more removed from understanding food cultivation than most Americans. Therefore it seemed that awareness from within our academic institution was an appropriate first step in addressing the inequalities in Apopka.

While the farmworkers are often forgotten, they are occasionally featured as "human interest stories" in news articles, and their stories are front and center of activist efforts to garner more attention for their situations. Yet despite the publicity the farmworkers have received, little has been done to change their situation. The pervasiveness of attitudes resting on the "culture of poverty[4]" model, ideas regarding deserving and undeserving poor, and unchallenged notions of "empowerment" and "self help" mentioned earlier, serve to reinforce discourses of individual responsibility associated with neoliberalism, and allow the public to excuse the desperate

conditions of this population. As with all attempts to change situations of inequality, our first step was reaching an audience and raising awareness. Drawing from Gayatri Spivak (1988), we recognized the problematic nature of an anthropologist's claims to speak for the powerless, but as anthropologists working to engage the public, we were able to create a setting in which we were able to amplify the voice of the disenfranchised. This process began to take shape in an auditorium with students and faculty listening to first-hand accounts of the horrors of Lake Apopka, as farmworker Geraldean Matthew and activist Jeannie Economos both shared background information and personal accounts with our college community. In conjunction with this event, we simultaneously began establishing a student-run farmworker awareness organization at our college, working with a liaison from the National Farmworker Association whose job is to help student groups develop on campus. This organization continues to grow in membership as more students, faculty and staff members incorporate farmworker issues and community-based research into their teaching and co-curricular activities, resulting (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003) in a growing demand for what became known as "toxic tours." Our college now hosts a series of events during Farmworker Awareness Week, and issues regarding farmworker justice are highlighted during events such as the campus-wide Peace Week. The collaboration with the Farmworker Association has led to several professors getting their classes involved in both research and fundraising projects tailored to the Farmworker Association's concerns. Resulting events have raised awareness among a group of privileged students and challenged their perceptions of poverty and illness.

From their exposure to the farmworkers' hardships, student leaders have arisen to address the community's material needs. These student leaders have organized week-long farmworker awareness events that include activities such as taking groups of students to fields to glean

produce and touring a "tunnel of oppression:" a corridor featuring images of substandard farmworker housing and action photos of farm labor. Furthermore, student activists have organized a social justice forum where farmworkers, the general public, and local government officials met to discuss problems about farm labor. The hardships of the Apopka farmworkers spiked interest in faculty as well, from disciplines such as anthropology, economics, and environmental studies, while also receiving attention from the campus Dean of the Chapel. Students outraged by the injustices they witnessed rallied around the farmworkers' adversity and attempted to find ways to address the population's needs, which are all interrelated to their health, economic, and labor hardships. In addition to these efforts, we also inspired student activists to make a short documentary about the suffering of the farmworkers; their work won best film in a campus competition, and they continue to produce film projects related to social justice for farmworkers.[5]

The importance of smaller, immediate solutions should not be underestimated. As the story of human suffering is often forgotten in South Apopka, we have worked to remind the public that conditions of extreme inequality can lead to great affliction. While larger structural changes must gradually occur, short-term methods of addressing inequalities and structural violence can prove effective and have a role in the larger process of change. Involving students through community engagement projects not only raises awareness about local issues of structural violence, but also illustrates a local example of issues people face worldwide. It is often difficult for students to confront inequality, especially when they only read about it in books, but experiential encounters with injustice have a more immediate impact. They employ students' problem-solving and critical thinking abilities as they ask the necessary questions to understand the deep structural roots of the problem. Students and staff members at Rollins

College have adopted the cause of the Apopka Farmworkers and are working to find creative solutions to help the population.

The language of activism does not always translate directly into academic research. In a meeting with the student filming the Apopka story, he asked me "Who's to blame here? Who's the bad guy?" This type of reasoning is typical among passionate seekers of social justice, and it must be approached with an answer that demonstrates there is no clear, single adversary. Our efforts have been to work with activists to help them identify that in a situation of suffering there is not always a "bad guy", but rather a series of systems and ideologies that indirectly harm people. It is through recognizing these systems that we can address the problems while involving the public.

The effects of small-scale projects on marginalized communities should also not go unnoticed. Attention and outrage from community outsiders generate hope for some community members in South Apopka. For Geraldean, seeing increased interest in Apopka and the production of a documentary are uplifting. These small steps may be criticized as being only minor improvements to a huge problem, but they carry enormous symbolic significance. Although symbols are not solutions, in a community where more attention has been turned to the wildlife subjected to the same chemicals as people, small gestures still have significance even though larger problems remain unsolved. Furthermore, through initiating smaller projects, we are effectively placing a foundation for the possibility of solving larger issues such as healthcare reform and pesticide overuse. At the very least, when students meet real people who have experienced firsthand the failures of the system, these encounters may inspire them to engage more deeply with a topic that might otherwise seem far removed from their experiences.

Community Involvement, Local Change, and the Classroom

As discussed in the previous section, collaborating with activist-oriented nonprofits in an academic setting creates lasting opportunities for engagement. Bringing engagement into a specific class setting can also benefit students by allowing them to critically challenge concepts related to empowerment, individual responsibility, and poverty, while considering how to address these issues. In one class, students initiated a series of healthcare seminars focusing on the needs of the population. Students were additionally required to write a community-based research paper on topics suggested by the activists that could be kept at the Farmworker Association and referred to for information on how other farmworker communities worldwide dealt with similar problems. The farmworkers had asked for the healthcare seminars at several local meetings sponsored by the health department, and students invited local experts on subjects such as nutrition, family psychology, and parenting to speak to the community in a roundtable format. During this time we were also able to address the community's dental health needs by collaborating with a faith-based organization to provide charitable dental services for the farmworkers (Kline 2010).

Long-term impact on the student population has been significant. The collaborative relationship with the Farmworker Association of Florida has resulted in ongoing projects in other classes across campus, as well as in alternative spring breaks and campus activism. Of the students who participated in the class that created the healthcare seminars, taught in Spring 2008, one has gone on to pursue an MPH and a PhD in Anthropology, with a focus on immigrant health. Another student now has a fellowship for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC) working on HIV harm reduction strategies in low-income communities. Both attribute their interest in immigration and healthcare to the lessons learned in this class.

The Farmworker Association of Florida has also attributed greater awareness about farmworker concerns to the catalyst provided by our initial project. Jeannie Economos, our principle contact, who has worked for the FWAF since 1996, says:

"Your involvement helped get the Orange County Health Department to work with us. They don't have a lot of resources either, but we have a good relationship with them now. That has helped us to get grants, [including] one that put better street lights in the community because of problems with safety and crime." She further added that our involvement had contributed to a state senator taking notice of the problem and being receptive to their campaign to request $500,000 toward healthcare for farmworkers in a bill that passed all levels of the Florida legislature before finally being vetoed by Governor Rick Scott.[6]

These small advancements represented the beginning of a significant increase in student/faculty involvement with the farmworker community, but they also demonstrated ways in which students could explore practical solutions to social problems from within a classroom. Furthermore, connections between our academic institution and Apopka can result in future advancements as more students become aware of the population's needs and develop their own specialized sets of skills. While students work to develop small scale solutions to local problems, they are also encouraged to think systemically about how larger issues such as industrial agriculture, immigration policy, and neoliberal economic practices contribute to farmworker suffering. Although we have been unable to successfully solve any of the larger issues of environmental racism or the denial of healthcare that continue to plague the Apopka population, we are working at informing a large audience of the multiple layers surrounding

structural violence while starting smaller projects that have the potential to grow into larger solutions. Further advancements, however, are not possible without a fundamental shift in ideologies, such as the pervasiveness of the culture of poverty model.

For students studying anthropology, the situation of the farmworkers helps to debunk taken-for-granted ideologies such as the culture of poverty model and "deserving" vs. undeserving poor. Issues such as structural violence come alive for students as they search for the elusive "bad guy" who could be blamed for the farmworkers' suffering. The "culture-of-poverty" model, as Schneider writes, "[maintains] that poor people remain poor because they never learned the work ethic" (Schneider 1999: 767). A strong work ethic was never the issue for the farmworkers. The Apopka farmworkers worked long, grueling hours in search of a livable wage, and often brought their children to work alongside them in order to maximize their household earnings. Students are able to see how in this scenario, the poor are an example of the hardest working people, but they lack benefits that the middle class usually associates with employment, such as healthcare. Furthermore, this allows students to begin to understand how healthcare becomes out of reach as it becomes suspect to neoliberal agendas. As healthcare becomes increasingly commoditized, it becomes more out of reach for many marginal populations, including the former farmworkers of Apopka.

In addition to fostering student reflection on the culture of poverty model, community-based research with the farmworker community calls into question notions of deserving and undeserving poor, as well as "charity" medicine. As Farmer writes:

> Many of us have been involved in these sorts of good works and have often heard a motto such as this: 'the homeless poor are every bit as deserving of good medical care as the rest of us.' The notion

> of a preferential option for the poor challenges us by reframing the motto: the homeless poor are *more* deserving of good medical care than the rest of us. Whenever medicine seeks to reserve its finest services for the destitute sick, you can be sure that it is option-for-the-poor medicine (Farmer 2003: 155).

The flawed ideology of deserving and undeserving poor contributes to the public indifference with inequality. Attitudes toward the poor often take individualistic approaches that assign self-responsibility to their conditions, but the poor can be victims of structural violence, which as Farmer so compellingly argues, remain invisible to the majority of people. With such persistent ideologies, students find that in Florida, wildlife are considered more deserving of assistance than poor farmworkers, whose years of work on the farms is elided due to the fact that it was often unofficial and thus did not always produce evidence for social security.[7] A deeper understanding of structural violence may contribute to a change in ideology among students who have always lived with a system of market-based medicine. In classroom situations, anthropologists can use their positions of influence to unite activism with academics, amplify the voice of the subaltern, and challenge ideologies by exposing larger systems working against oppressed populations.

Future Solutions

What, then, can be done to address the health needs of the Apopka population? Many scholars have addressed the shortcomings of market-based medicine in the United States and how profit-driven healthcare systems can put strains on safety-net medical providers (Boehm

2005; Draper et al. 2002; Horton 2001; Maskovsky 2000; Rylko-Bauer and Farmer 2002). Safety net organizations in Apopka already exist in some capacity but do not have the resources to make them as effective as possible. A local clinic lacks the staff and funding necessary to address the specific and complicated health problems of the former farmworkers, and one charity organization only provides routine care once a month. These organizations can only function through whatever governmental support they receive in addition to charitable donations. While Farmer has criticized charity medicine, the current medical system operates on capitalist principles that are not likely to change easily. That notwithstanding, it is necessary to critique the weaknesses of the current system while finding a way to work within its constraints. With more charitable funding it may be possible develop safety net programs for Apopka, and charitable funding can only be made possible by dismantling specific ideologies such as the culture of poverty model.

Recognizing the privileged positions of anthropologists and the emotionally stirring gifts of activists, it is possible to utilize both anthropologists and activists in the most effective ways to bring about positive social change. Activist appeals, if couched in social scientific "evidence" of the structures at work, can move audiences. By conducting community-based research that activists do not have the time to perform, student anthropologists can produce the social scientific "data" that activists can then use as "evidence" to support their causes. In this capacity, the anthropologist and activist team can work together to change public policy while commenting on social inequalities without reducing problems to polarizing scenarios. In only three years, we have already seen that activists from the Farmworker Association have successfully been able to use student-driven data in successful grant proposals to funding agencies. Even with its difficulties, we have managed to forge a successful and ongoing

collaboration at the intersection of anthropology, activism, and student engagement that serves to challenge neoliberal constructs while also emphasizing the necessity to address material needs for marginalized populations.

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[1] Geraldean Matthew is a public figure and we have not given her a pseudonym for this reason.

[2] The state of Florida purchased the land and farm equipment from the farm owners at market value. In a particularly ironic twist, informants told us that the state then auctioned the equipment off at much lower prices, when many of the farm owners returned to purchase it in order to set up farming operations in other states. For more information on the state of Florida's purchase of the farmland, see pg. 140 in Riley, Nano and Davida Johns 2002 Florida's Farmworkers in the Twenty-First Century. Gainesville: University Press of Florida

[3] All names, except those of public figures such as Geraldean Matthew and Jeannie Economos, have been changed.

[4] The culture of poverty theory became widely known by Oscar Lewis's 1959 work titled "Five Families; Mexican Case Studies In The Culture Of Poverty."

[5] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8Xb3I9O9NQ, "Out of the Muck," produced by Shaun and Jamie Cricks, which won prizes at the 2008 Campus Movie Fest. They have since founded Double Donut Productions, which continues to make films about farmworker issues.

[6] Personal communication, Jeannie Economos, January 28, 2013.

[7] Witness the national attention to the Apopka bird deaths in 1998, while the years of slow suffering experienced by the farmworkers as a result of exposure to the same chemicals through employment continues to go ignored by the wider society.

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